

Prayer and Change

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 27 May 2018

Preacher: Daniel Ralph

[0 : 0 0] We're in the final part of chapter 1, which is verses 15 through to 23, a noted thanksgiving and prayer. It's one of those appropriate titles.

Not every title that heads a section is always that informative, but that's essentially what this is about.

So, Ephesians 1, beginning at verse 15, now hear God's word. For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and your love towards all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him.

Having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you. What are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints?

And what is the immeasurable greatness of his power towards us who believe? According to the working of his great might that he has worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places.

[1 : 2 9] Far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the age to come.

And he put all things under his feet and gave him as a head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Well, let me pray for us this morning. Father, we would ask very simply that you would enlighten our minds for the view of changing our hearts, that Father, your word, which is your word spoken to us, is the word that we respond to or not respond to, but it is yours.

So, Father, we pray that by your grace this morning that we would hear you and respond to you in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. To put this simply, it takes the grace of God for someone to be full of gratitude.

It really does take the grace of God for someone to be really full of thankfulness. Now, there are general levels of thankfulness and general levels of gratitude, but it is extremely difficult to, you know, be full of gratitude and thankfulness towards God, especially when you collide with God's governing of your life. And many Christians do collide with God's governing over their life, and therefore thankfulness is then difficult because you're being thankful to God, the God that you are colliding with. And the Ephesians, upon their conversion, collided with God, hence their initial conversion, which we will look at in a minute. But this part here is really about Paul demonstrating why he is thankful to God, why he is thankful to God, why it's right to be thankful to God and demonstrate gratitude. So this part here is about being thankful, but it's also about demonstrating that thankfulness in prayer. And the prayer here is not just, this is just something we do. When you actually note the things that Paul prays for, you begin to realize two things. One, don't do that anymore. And two, begin to start doing this.

[4 : 08] And so, well, what are those things? Well, those things come out of his prayer. So this is the summary. You'll notice that Paul is first thankful that these Christians have received faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and their love for one another. Okay? He's thankful to God that they have faith in God. He is thankful to God that they love one another. He's not commending them. He could commend them, but he's thankful to God for the way they are towards Christ and towards each other, verse 15.

But then he also goes on to say, verse 17, that the transformation isn't over. The transformation isn't over. May God give you the spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him. In other words, you've come a long way, but you've not got to the end. And sometimes it is possible for Christians to think that once they are saved, they've arrived. But salvation in Scripture is the starting point, not the finishing line. Okay? When a person is saved, they've not crossed the finish line, they've crossed the start line. And that is something that is often misunderstood. Salvation is a new beginning. It is a new life. All things have become new. You begin again. You are born again to begin again. And so sometimes we can rest back. Now that I'm saved, okay, this is it. I'm at the end.

No, salvation is the very beginning. It is the crossing of the start line with your walk with God. Hence why Paul prays here, verse 17, that you may be given comprehension, spirit of wisdom, revelation, comprehension, able to understand in the knowledge of God. In other words, you've changed, but the transformation isn't over. Now, notice that Paul is praying about this to God. In other words, what he's saying is that this type of change can only happen in a person's life by praying about it.

But how often do we expect change to happen in our lives or in the lives of other people by simply telling them to change? You're going to have to change. You're going to have to do things differently.

This is a bit like, as I've always said, telling somebody that they've got to have faith without preceding it with the word of God, which produces faith. There is an order to the way God expects things to be done because in the same way you plant seeds in soil, you then water them, and then the growth comes. I mean, you can't go against that order and expect the same type of results.

[6 : 55] So, the way God orders things is for the benefit of fruitfulness, is for the benefit of transformation, is for the benefit of your joy. So, God isn't being pedantic here, but what he's simply saying is if you want certain things to happen, then certain things have to happen in certain orders for them to happen. So, I think it's quite crucial here to realize that if you want to see change in the church or in a person's life or in your own life, stop trying to change. Pray about it. You have to bring these things before God because God is the source of change, not you. Okay? God is the source of making a difference. Now, we can make differences, but they're rarely the kind of differences that we want to see and the differences that we want to last. So, Paul is here talking about a continual transformation. And then he goes on to say, verse 18, of the glorious inheritance that we will all inherit. And then he grounds that in the fact that Jesus has no competing authority. He has no competing authority at all. In other words, we don't live in a world where Jesus is up against all the other religions. Christianity has really got it tough at the minute because, lo and behold, there's five more religions have been invented in the world. As though we are competing against

Hinduism or we're competing against Islam or we're competing against Buddhism or we're competing against other made-up religions. No, Christianity doesn't sit on the playground of competing authorities.

Christ is over all and above all. He is over what people say in other countries concerning other religions and fads and so forth and so on. And the same here. And the Christian is meant to understand that. The Christian is meant to live under the authority of Jesus, knowing that Jesus is over and above all. It's not that Jesus is competing. There is no competition for Jesus. If Jesus is Lord over all, then he is Lord over the Islam. He is Lord over Buddhism. Now, those things are not right. Those things are not consistent with God. But he's still Lord over everything. He doesn't compete with these things. So, the idea of sometimes getting into a religious debate, of sparring out the differences, as to somehow prove that Jesus can win this fight, Jesus isn't even in the fight. Jesus isn't even in the fight. He's high and lifted way above all of those things. Now, at an earthly level, it looks like that we're trying to defend the faith. But what we're defending is something that is high and above overall, which is Jesus can defend himself. But the issue at hand is that this faith doesn't compete.

It stands all by itself. Because at the end of the day, at the end of the day, we're not going to get before God. And, you know, whichever proved to be the best religion on earth gets to go to heaven.

That's not the way it works. And this is something that Paul wants to drive home to the Christian, that he seems to believe that Christians think that they live in a world with competing authorities.

[10 : 20] There are no competing authorities. Jesus is the ruler of all. It may not look like that down here on the ground, but he really is the ruler of all. This is why we call people to repent and believe in Jesus.

Okay? We're trying to get them to Jesus, not to anywhere else. This isn't a staged process. This is you belong to Jesus. This is where you're meant to belong. And then he demonstrates that the place of belonging, verse 23, is the church, that the body of Christ is you, that you represent Christ on earth.

And therefore, to be filled with the spirit of wisdom and of revelation has a very important purpose, and that is that you reflect the Lord Jesus Christ through everything that you say, everything that you do.

By being in church, by being in the world, you reflect Christ. And that's the point here. But again, you know, these are Christians that are having to learn a lot pretty quickly. Okay? Because the temptation always with people who have been saved is that they are much further ahead in the spirit of wisdom and of revelation than what they really are, than what they really are. It's a bit like, it's a bit like, you know, a 33-year-old being saved and not realizing that they're in P1 in Christianity.

Okay? You go all right back to the beginning, that they think because they're 33, they must start at that level. We go back to the basics. So, Paul's point here is that everything is moving in a single direction to where one day Christ will be seen as the ruler of all as he already is. The baby who grows up to be a child, who then grows up to be an adult, only gets to see and understand more through a process of time.

[12 : 21] Okay? You don't get any baby geniuses. Okay? You know, you may see a few programs where my child's a genius. But he may be smart. But if you don't know, then you don't know. And the most difficult people to get through to, biblically speaking, are the people who don't know that they don't know. Because you can't get anywhere. If you don't know that you don't know, then there's no reason to proceed anywhere. But if you realize, if you know that you don't know, then that's where learning begins. If you know that there's a lot in the Bible that you don't know, it's at that point that you begin to pray to God for wisdom and revelation. Because I know there's a lot more here than what I actually know. And that's the person who begins to grow. Okay? But that stubbornness of, I don't know that I don't know, or I think I do know it all, and therefore there's no need for me to know any more, that's a very difficult hurdle to get across. For a teacher to a congregation or for a person themselves. So here we have Paul praying for change. Okay? He's not expecting them to change because he's telling them to. He's expecting them to change because he's praying for it. He expects change in this congregation because he's praying to

God that they would change, that they would be different. Now, that does require us to change. That does require us to respond. And here's the reason why it's so important. If you as a Christian do not continue to change, you will default to type. You will default to the natural man.

Anytime, if I can put it this way, you see things about your mother or your grandmother or your dad or your granddad come out in the way that you say things that you know are not Christian.

Okay? That's because you're defaulting to type. Okay? Anything that is true of the natural man that's not true of the spiritual man, the reason you default to type is because you're not changing.

Okay? When a person doesn't know how to do anything different, guess what? They won't do anything different. When a person doesn't know how to think in a different way, then guess what? They won't think in a different way. They'll do things they always did because they have to default to type because they've stopped growing. There's no continual change. So, here's the background to how the Ephesians were converted. Over in Acts chapter 19, the Ephesians came to faith, but before they did, they used to practice the dark arts. They used to write books on the subject, magic books. These were books, you know, clearly in line with evil and all things surrounding evil, and their books sold for a lot of money. But it tells us in Acts 19 that when they heard the word of the Lord, they repented and they believed in the Lord. When they fell upon the power of the Lord Jesus Christ, they were transformed.

[15 : 30] Now, upon their conversion, the first thing that they did, or at least that we read about upon their conversion, is they took all of their magic books, they took all of their dark art books, the things that they made a living from, and started a bonfire and burnt the lot. And the reason they burnt the lot is because they understood that they had to have a clear break from the past. A clear break from the past.

They cannot live off the past in the future. They can't afford to do that. Now, the value of these books amounted to 50,000 silver coins. Even in today's money, that's a lot of money. Now, I know what you're thinking, okay, but you shouldn't be. Why didn't they just sell the books and live off the profits?

Well, because that would be to perpetuate your future on the basis of something that is essentially evil and wrong. The reason they burnt the books is not only to have a clear break from the past, but rather because they wouldn't profit from evil ways. That they wouldn't profit from the things that they thought that the world did. Now, the world approved of these things. So, in the world's eyes, they could have sold the books and people could have carried on as normal. But from a Christian point of view, you can't do that. You can't do that. It's a bit like a Christian doing the lottery, winning a couple of million, and then giving it to the church. The church doesn't want that money because, biblically speaking, nobody is allowed to profit at the expense of another person losing, which is exactly what the lottery promotes. Any form of gambling is known as a zero-sum game, which means you can only win at the expense of somebody else losing. Proverbs tells us that that is unrighteous gain. Unrighteous gain is a world where there are winners and losers. But in the economy of God's grace, okay, if God was to write a book on biblical economics, there are no winners and losers.

Okay? But we live in a world, right? And this is how the world operates. I understand that's how the world operates. But as from these Ephesian Christians, they recognize that's not how the Lord operates. So, they burn them and they will not profit from them. But here's the other thing that they're burning. And this is crucially important. They're burning their inheritance. They're burning their mortgage payments. They're burning their future pensions. Okay? When somebody burns their living because their living is inconsistent with the grace of God, they're not just burning their present living, they're burning their pension pot at the end of the day. They're burning their future inheritance at the end of the day. So, these are Christians who understand what it means to follow Christ, what it means to have a clear break from the past, and what it means to not profit from unrighteous ways. Just because the world does it, okay, okay, the person who thinks, well, this is how everybody does it, right, is fate. They're defaulting to type. They are, this is why Paul's praying that they be given the spirit of wisdom and of revelation because they're unable to think differently.

So, they're just default. This is how the world works. So, right? No, you're defaulting to type. In other words, your conversion has not yet worked its way out into the rest of your life.

[18 : 59] But here in the Ephesians, the conversion has worked its way out into the very fingertips of their life to the point of even what they do for a living. And this is the reason why Paul wants to stress the point in verse 18 that they have a glorious inheritance, that these are people who have burnt their pension pots.

These are people who have burnt their future inheritance in worldly terms. And Paul recognizes that these people need to understand, they need to hear, that you don't lose out by belonging to Christ.

You don't lose out even for a second by belonging to Christ. You have a glorious inheritance. So, whatever things you lose in this world, Paul says, you know, I count all things lost compared to having Christ and knowing Christ. So, there's a clear distinction being made in Christianity, okay? These Ephesian Christians are converted at great loss, worldly speaking. But upon their conversion, Paul says, you have been converted into great gain. And your great gain is a glorious inheritance that you will enter into. Now, whenever that happens in a person's life, whenever they have been converted and they are so convicted that they are now on the break of, humanly speaking, devastation. Where am I going to live?

What am I going to eat? What am I going to do? What job am I going to have now that I've just burnt my previous job? What am I going to do? Okay? This is what Paul does. He prays that they be given the spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of God. In other words, what do you do when you don't know what to do? Okay? And there are plenty of Christians who carry on with doing things the way that they do them, okay? Not because they're convicted either way, but actually because everything operates at a convenience, okay? It's convenient for me to carry on this way because look what's at stake, okay? Okay?

It's convenient for me to have a blind eye. It's convenient for me not to go to the Bible study and learn because if I learn and then I'm convicted by the truth, I'm going to have to change. And I'm not sure. I mean, that's going to be incredibly inconvenient. And so what happens is you have a group of people, some who change and don't change based on convenience and some who do based on conviction. And these are the two things that grab people in the church and in the world, okay?

[21 : 39] Are we motivated out of conviction or are we motivated out of convenience, okay? Well, only you can decide on what falls into what categories throughout your life. What Paul does, instead of getting into those which are the issues, he simply prays for them to be given the spirit of wisdom and of revelation. And this is why. Because a person can handle an implication, but they can't handle an application. In other words, a person can be shown two roads, okay? But they are very resistant when they are told to go down one and not the other, okay? People aren't resistant when you give them options, but they are very resistant when you tell them, choose this one and not this one.

So what Paul does is he brings them to the point of implication, okay? This is the way of the Lord and this is the way contrary to the way of the Lord. And then instead of him saying, follow the way of the Lord, which he does elsewhere in other places, here he says, I'm going to pray about it.

I'm going to pray that God gets through to you, right? Because maybe I can't. So he prays for the congregation that they will receive wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God. Paul recognizes that continual change, as from the initial change, can only happen if he prays for them. And this becomes apparent when you read the rest of his letter because he starts speaking about employment.

He starts speaking about marriage. He starts speaking about children. He starts speaking about even to spiritual warfare. In other words, Paul is going somewhere with this letter. In other words, he wants Christianity to be worked out in every sphere of your life, okay? Through your employment, through your marriages, through your parenting, through your children, through everything, okay? And this is where he's starting. He is starting with the fact that change happens in respect to receiving the spirit of wisdom and knowledge. Now, here's the problem. If a person doesn't change, if a person doesn't continue to change based on the Lordship of Christ, in other words, you know, their life is not really about the praise of God. It's about convenience. But as we've seen in the first part of Ephesians, God has saved us to the praise of his glory. The reason why God has saved us is so that our whole life might bring him praise, that our whole life might be a single act of worship in everything that we think, say, and do, that our whole life might bring him praise. And so

Paul is just now getting into the details. And the reason why is because any person who doesn't continue to change defaults to type. Now, I would imagine that most of you, at least some of you, have been in that position where you have seen something in your parent or parents come out in you.

[24 : 56] You know, why does that happen? Well, it's because I'm their daughter or I'm their son. Well, that could be the reason, but I don't think that it is. Because there are plenty of parents, there are plenty of sons and daughters who are nothing like their parents. So what needs to be explained is why there's change in one and not change in the other. And the answer is change.

Okay? People who don't change, okay, if people, if you see something in you that's equivalent to what your mum was like and it's good and it's godly, then that's a gracious inheritance. That's something wonderful to hold on to and to give thanks to God for. But if you see something come out of your life, okay, that represents, you know, your mum's sin or your dad's sin, then the reason it's coming out in your life is because you're defaulting to type. You've not yet changed. They didn't change and you haven't changed either. And so the reason why Paul is pressing home this need to receive wisdom and revelation is so that you don't default to type. In other words, so that you don't go backwards, so that you don't go back to the natural man. If you read Romans chapter 6, okay, it's quite clear that we are to consider God's mercies, we're to consider what God has done for us, we're to consider the fact that Jesus has died and rose again and that we belong to him. Because if we don't, if we don't consider that we are a new man, we will default to the old man. We will start thinking in the old ways. We'll start practicing in the old ways. So the reason for a continual change is simply because if we don't, we get pulled back to the natural man on like this invisible spring.

Okay, change is constantly moving us away from the old man. And without continual change, we simply get pulled back and we default to what we normally do. So the old attitudes come out, the old ways of doing things come out. Okay, we're converted, but now so much of the old person is coming out in what we do. Why do you think the Ephesians wanted a clear break from the past, burning their books and not profiting from selling those books? Well, because they don't want to default to type. They don't want to go backwards. They want a clear break from the world. They want a clear break. Now, the rest of their friends, worldly speaking, would have carried on as normal.

They would have happily taken on those books and sold them. But they knew that nobody should be profiting or at least promoting anything that is contrary to God. Because God has, as Paul goes on to, no rivals. There is no rival authority. And this means that we are to comprehend more. God gives us the spirit of wisdom and of revelation so that we are able to tell the difference between the two.

The only way you can make a godly decision is to have the godly attributes of God encouraging you to make that decision, without which you just default to type. Unless we have God's power within us, which is exactly what he says, the same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead, is what he's saying, is the same power that brings you to a level of comprehension that you didn't previously have. Okay? But as I said before, as I said before, if the direction, I think one of the best ways and the simplest ways of working out, should we be doing anything in this life, whether or not it's actually consistent with God or not, is simply to ask the question, will it be in the new heavens and the new earth? Okay? And if you don't see what you're doing has a place in the new heavens and the new earth, according to what God says about the new heavens and the new earth, then you're investing in the wrong area. Okay? Your investment is on earth. You're not like... See, most people think that God tells us not to lay up treasures. But if you read it carefully, if you read it carefully, Jesus does not tell us not to lay up treasures. He says, don't store them up on earth, rather send them ahead. Lay up for yourself treasures in heaven. So, there's nothing against the storing of treasure, absolutely none whatsoever. You're meant to store up treasure, you're meant to store up huge wads of treasure, but you're to lay them up in heaven, not on earth. Okay? So, the issue here isn't stop doing it. The issue here is do it differently.

[29 : 39] Okay? Be the type of person that wants to hoard treasure, but lay it up in heaven. And then you'll realize, well, is this going to make it into the new heavens and new earth or not? Okay? And this is what the Ephesians understood upon their conversion, that what they were invested in will not make it into heaven. This is not the type of thing I can lay up in heaven, because it won't make it there. Okay? The reason they need the spirit of wisdom is so that they can change, so that they can know what to change. So, here's the exhortation as we close. Paul understands, he deeply understands, and I find it deeply convicting as a pastor, that what the church needs most is prayer. Not that the church needs to pray more, that's certainly true, but the church needs to be prayed for more. Okay? Notice the distinction? It's not that the church needs to pray more, which is true. Okay? We all need to pray more.

But here, the conviction to me as a pastor is that the church needs to be prayed for more. Okay? You need to be prayed for more by each other and by me. And the reason why that is so necessary is because the type of change that brings praise to God is the type of change that only God can create. Okay? I can't start a new program and bring praise to God. I can't start a new course and bring praise to God. I can't...

The type of thing that brings praise to God is the type of thing that only God can begin. And so, if I want to start it, then I ask God to start it. If I want to see it happen, as Paul does here in this church, he prays to God for it to happen. Okay? So, any change that you make in the future is not hypocritical. It's called growth. Okay? Just because you did it this way in the past and you're now doing it this different way in the future, you're not a hypocrite if it's more in line with God. Okay? It's called growth. But too often, we don't change. One, because we don't know what to change. And two, because it's inconvenient. But true growth, true growth in the spirit of wisdom and revelation means that we experience the loss on earth because we're laying it up in heaven.

Okay? We're experiencing, in some cases, massive loss on earth because we're laying it up in heaven. And Paul goes on to say that as you do all of this, as you do all of this, you remember that where Christ is. He's seated at the right hand of God with authority over all and in all. That's where Christ is.

That's where your God is. And that's when he comes. That is, when he comes again, that is where he comes from. He comes from the throne of authority and of power and he's going to take you with him. He's coming to get you. And as he comes to get you, he comes, you better not be holding on to, right?

[32 : 46] Yeah, but I've still got three skiing lessons to go. Can you not come back next year? Right? If that's, you know, if you feel that Christ coming is somehow inconvenient to what you're doing now, yeah, I've just booked a holiday. You know, I'm due to go away in October and you've come in August.

Did you not? I mean, you know all things. Did you not think about coming in November? Okay? If that's the way your heart is inclined, then it simply means that your heart is not truly geared to Christ now. Okay? It's not a criticism. It's simply to say that it isn't right, is it? And listen, my heart's the same. My mind's the same. We all need to grow. We all need the spirit of wisdom and of revelation. So here's the conclusion. You will, as promised by God, experience his power in your life. But his power turns up in the form of continual transformation. It turns up in the form of personal change. It turns up in the form of you being more different in a year from now than what you were 10 years ago. In other words, each year that you spend with Christ, each day that you spend with Christ, you are being changed. And the reason why it's necessary is so that you don't default to type, so that you don't default to the old way of doing things, to your old nature. And here's why.

Because the old nature doesn't make it into the new heavens. The old ways don't make it into the new heavens. Okay? Nothing old gets put into new wineskins. You don't do it, and God doesn't do it that way. So Paul prays to God for change, because the change is necessary. Amen.

Amen.